CHAPTER 17

# Roots of Human Violence and Greed: A Psychospiritual Perspective

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The study of holotropic states of consciousness has amassed a rich array of observations that have revolutionized understanding of the human psyche in health and disease. The importance of many of these findings transcends the framework of individual psychology; they seem to offer deep insights into the dimensions of the current global crisis, which have so far been neglected, and suggest strategies that might be useful for its alleviation. In this chapter, I will explore these new perspectives with special emphasis on two elemental forces that have driven human history since time immemorial to the present time—the proclivity to unbridled violence and to insatiable greed. Because of the development of weapons of mass destruction, relentless population explosion, escalating plundering of natural resources, and increase of industrial pollution, these two scourges now threaten survival of the human species and other forms of life on this planet.

## VIOLENCE AND GREED IN HUMAN HISTORY

The number and degree of atrocities that have been committed throughout the ages in various countries of the world, many of them in the name of God, are truly unimaginable and indescribable. Millions of soldiers and civilians have been killed in wars and revolutions of all types or in other forms of atrocities. During his unparalleled military campaign, Alexander the Great destroyed the Persian empire and conquered all the countries between Macedonia and India. Secular and religious ambitions—from the expansion of the Roman Empire to the spread of Islam and the Christian Crusades—found

their expression in the merciless use of sword and fire. In ancient Rome, countless Christians were sacrificed in the arenas to provide a highly sought-after spectacle for the masses.

Hundreds of thousands of innocent victims were tortured, killed, or burned alive in the autos-da-fé by the medieval Inquisition. In Mesoamerica, countless soldiers of the tribes defeated by the Aztecs, who had not died in the battle, were slaughtered on sacrificial altars. The Aztec cruelty found its match in the bloody ventures of the Spanish conquistadores. Genghis Khan's and Tamerlane's Mongolian hordes swept through Asia, killing, pillaging, and burning towns and villages. The colonialism of Great Britain and other European countries and the Napoleonic wars were additional examples of violence and relentless greed.

This trend has continued in an unmitigated fashion in the 20th century. The loss of life in World War I was estimated at 10 million soldiers and 20 million civilians. Additional millions died from war-spread epidemics and famine. In World War II, approximately twice as many lives were lost. The 20th century saw the expansionism of Nazi Germany and the horrors of the Holocaust, Stalin's reckless domination of Eastern Europe and his Gulag Archipelago, and the civil terror in Communist China. We can add to it the victims of South American dictatorships, the atrocities and genocide committed by the Chinese in Tibet, and the cruelties of South Africa's apartheid. The wars in Korea and Vietnam, the wars in the Middle East, and the slaughter in Yugoslavia and Rwanda are some more examples of the senseless bloodshed we have witnessed during the last hundred years.

Human greed has also found new, less violent forms of expression in the philosophy and strategy of capitalist economies emphasizing increase of the gross national product, "unlimited growth," reckless plundering of nonrenewable natural resources, conspicuous consumption, and "planned obsolescence." Moreover, much of this wasteful economic policy that has disastrous ecological consequences has been oriented toward production of weapons of increasing destructive power.

## DOOMSDAY SCENARIOS THREATENING LIFE ON OUR PLANET

In the past, violence and greed had tragic consequences for the individuals involved in the internecine encounters and for their immediate families. However, they did not threaten the evolution of the human species as a whole and certainly did not represent a danger for the ecosystem and for the biosphere of the planet. Even after the most violent wars, nature was able to recycle all the aftermath and completely recover within a few decades. This situation has changed very radically in the course of the 20th century. Rapid technological progress, exponential growth of industrial production, massive

population explosion, and particularly the discovery of atomic energy have forever changed the equations involved.

In the course of the 20th century, we have witnessed more major scientific and technological breakthroughs within a single decade, or even a single year, than people in earlier historical periods experienced in an entire century. However, these astonishing intellectual successes have brought modern humanity to the brink of a global catastrophe, because they were not matched by a comparable growth of emotional and moral maturity. We have the dubious privilege of being the first species in natural history that has achieved the capacity to eradicate itself and destroy in the process all life on this planet.

The intellectual history of humanity is one of its incredible triumphs. We have been able to learn the secrets of nuclear energy, send spaceships to the moon and all the planets of the solar system, transmit sound and color pictures all around the globe and across cosmic space, crack the DNA code, and begin experimenting with cloning and genetic engineering. At the same time, these superior technologies are being used in the service of primitive emotions and instinctual impulses that are not very different from those that drove the behavior of the people in the Stone Age.

Unimaginable sums of money have been wasted in the insanity of the arms race, and the use of even a miniscule fraction of the existing arsenal of atomic weapons would destroy all life on earth. Tens of millions of people have been killed in the two world wars and in countless other violent confrontations occurring for ideological, racial, religious, or economic reasons. Hundreds of thousands have been bestially tortured by the secret police of various totalitarian systems. Insatiable greed is driving people to hectic pursuit of profit and acquisition of personal property beyond any reasonable limits. This strategy has resulted in a situation where, besides the specter of a nuclear war, humanity is threatened by several less spectacular, but insidious and more predictable, doomsday scenarios.

Among these are industrial pollution of soil, water, and air; the threat of nuclear waste and accidents; the destruction of the ozone layer; the greenhouse effect and global warming; possible loss of planetary oxygen through reckless deforestation and poisoning of the ocean plankton; and the dangers of toxic additives in our food and drinks. To this, we can add a number of developments that are of less apocalyptic nature but equally disturbing, such as species extinction proceeding at an astronomical rate, homelessness and starvation of a significant percentage of the world's population, deterioration of family and crisis of parenthood, disappearance of spiritual values, absence of hope and positive perspective, loss of meaningful connection with nature, and general alienation. As a result of all the above factors, humanity now lives in chronic anguish, on the verge of a nuclear and ecological catastrophe, while in possession of fabulous technology approaching that of the world of science fiction.

Modern science has developed effective means that could solve most of the urgent problems in today's world—combat the majority of diseases, eliminate hunger and poverty, reduce the amount of industrial waste, and replace destructive fossil fuels by renewable sources of clean energy. The problems that stand in the way are not of economical or technological nature; their deepest sources lie inside the human personality. Because of them, unimaginable resources have been wasted in the absurdity of the arms race, power struggles, and pursuit of "unlimited growth." They also prevent a more appropriate distribution of wealth among individuals and nations, as well as a reorientation from purely economic and political concerns to ecological priorities that are critical for survival of life on this planet.

## PSYCHOSPIRITUAL ROOTS OF THE GLOBAL CRISIS

Diplomatic negotiations, administrative and legal measures, economic and social sanctions, military interventions, and other similar efforts have had very little success; as a matter of fact, they have often produced more problems than they solved. It is becoming increasingly clear why they had to fail. The strategies used to alleviate this crisis are rooted in the same ideology that created it in the first place. In the last analysis, the current global crisis is basically a psychospiritual crisis; it reflects the level of consciousness evolution of the human species. It is, therefore, hard to imagine that it could be resolved without a radical inner transformation of humanity on a large scale and its rise to a higher level of emotional maturity and spiritual awareness.

The task of imbuing humanity with an entirely different set of values and goals might appear too unrealistic and utopian to offer any real hope. Considering the paramount roles of violence and greed in human history, the possibility of transforming modern humanity into a species of individuals capable of peaceful coexistence with their fellow men and women regardless of race, color, and religious or political conviction, let alone with other species, certainly does not seem very plausible. We are facing the necessity to instill humanity with profound ethical values, sensitivity to the needs of others, acceptance of voluntary simplicity, and a sharp awareness of ecological imperatives. At first glance, such a task appears too fantastic even for a science fiction movie.

However, although serious and critical, the situation might not be as hopeless as it appears. After more than 40 years of intensive study of holotropic states of consciousness, I have come to the conclusion that the theoretical concepts and practical approaches developed by transpersonal psychology, a discipline that is trying to integrate spirituality with the new paradigm emerging in Western science, could help alleviate the crisis we are all facing. These observations suggest that the radical psychospiritual transformation of humanity is not only possible but also already underway. The question is

only whether it can be sufficiently fast and extensive to reverse the current self-destructive trend of modern humanity.

## THREE POISONS OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM

Let us take a look at the theoretical insights from the research of holotropic states and their practical implications for our everyday life. Can the new knowledge be used in a way that would make our life more fulfilling and rewarding? How could systematic self-exploration using holotropic states improve our emotional and physical well-being and bring about positive personality transformation and beneficial changes of the worldview and system of values? And, more specifically, how could this strategy contribute to alleviation of the global crisis and survival of life on this planet?

Spiritual teachers of all ages seem to agree that pursuit of material goals, in and of itself, cannot bring us fulfillment, happiness, and inner peace. The rapidly escalating global crisis, moral deterioration, and growing discontent accompanying the increase of material affluence in the industrial societies bear witness to this ancient truth. There seems to be general agreement in the mystical literature that the remedy for the existential malaise that besets humanity is to turn inside, look for the answers in our own psyche, and undergo a deep psychospiritual transformation.

It is not difficult to understand that an important prerequisite for successful existence is general intelligence—the ability to learn and recall, think and reason, and adequately respond to our material environment. More recent research emphasized the importance of "emotional intelligence," the capacity to adequately respond to our human environment and skillfully handle our interpersonal relationships (Goleman, 1996). Observations from the study of holotropic states confirm the basic tenet of perennial philosophy that the quality of our life ultimately depends on what can be called *spiritual intelligence.*

Spiritual intelligence is the capacity to conduct our life in such a way that it reflects deep philosophical and metaphysical understanding of reality and of ourselves. This, of course, brings questions about the nature of the psychospiritual transformation that is necessary to achieve this form of intelligence, the direction of the changes that we have to undergo, and the means that can facilitate such development. A very clear and specific answer to these questions can be found in different schools of Mahayana Buddhism.

We can use here as the basis for our discussion the famous Tibetan screen painting (*thangka*) portraying the cycle of life, death, and reincarnation. It depicts the Wheel of Life held in the grip of the horrifying Lord of Death. The wheel is divided into six segments representing the different *lokas,* or realms into which we can be reborn. The celestial domain of gods (*devaloka*) is shown as being challenged from the adjacent segment *(asuraloka)* by the jealous warrior gods. The region of hungry ghosts (*pretaloka)* is inhabited

by pitiful creatures representing insatiable greed. They have giant bellies, enormous appetites, and mouths the size of a pinhole. The remaining sections of the wheel depict the world of human beings (*manakaloka*), the realm of the wild beasts (*tiryakaloka*), and hell (*narakaloka*). Inside the wheel are two concentric circles. The outer one shows the ascending and descending paths along which souls travel. The innermost circle contains three animals—a pig, a snake, and a rooster.

The animals in the center of the wheel represent the "three poisons," or forces that, according to the Buddhist teachings, perpetuate the cycles of birth and death and are responsible for all the suffering in our life. The pig symbolizes *ignorance* concerning the nature of reality and our own nature, the snake stands for *anger and aggression*, and the rooster depicts *desire and lust* leading to attachment. The quality of our life and our ability to cope with the challenges of existence depend critically on the degree to which we are able to eliminate or transform these forces that run the world of sentient beings. Let us now look from this perspective at the process of systematic self-exploration involving holotropic states of consciousness.

## PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE AND TRANSCENDENTAL WISDOM

The most obvious benefit that we can obtain from deep experiential work is access to extraordinary knowledge about ourselves, other people, nature, and the cosmos. In holotropic states, we can reach deep understanding of the unconscious dynamics of our psyche. We can discover how our perception of ourselves and of the world is influenced by forgotten or repressed memories from childhood, infancy, birth, and prenatal existence. In addition, in transpersonal experiences we can identify with other people, various animals, plants, and elements of the inorganic world. Experiences of this kind represent an extremely rich source of unique insights about the world we live in and can radically transform our worldview.

In recent years, many authors have pointed out that a significant factor in the development of the global crisis has been the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm and monistic materialism that have dominated Western science for the last 300 years. This way of thinking involves a sharp dichotomy between mind and nature and portrays the universe as a giant, fully deterministic supermachine governed by mechanical laws. The image of the cosmos as a mechanical system has led to the erroneous belief that it can be adequately understood by dissecting it and studying all its parts. This has been a serious obstacle for viewing problems in terms of their complex interactions and from a holistic perspective.

In addition, by elevating matter to the most important principle in the cosmos, Western science reduces life, consciousness, and intelligence to

accidental by-products of material processes. In this context, humans appear to be nothing more than highly developed animals. This led to the acceptance of antagonism, competition, and the Darwinian "survival of the fittest" as the leading principles of human society. In addition, the description of nature as unconscious provided the justification for its exploitation by humans, following the program very eloquently formulated by Francis Bacon (1870).

Psychoanalysis has painted a pessimistic picture of human beings as creatures whose primary motivating forces are bestial instincts. According to Freud, if we were not afraid of societal repercussions and controlled by the superego (internalized parental prohibitions and injunctions), we would kill and steal indiscriminately, commit incest, and be involved in unbridled promiscuous sex. This image of human nature relegated such concepts as complementarity, synergy, mutual respect, and peaceful cooperation into the domain of temporary opportunistic strategies or naïve utopian fantasies. It is not difficult to see how these concepts and the system of values associated with them have helped to create the crisis we are facing.

Insights from holotropic states have brought convincing support for a radically different understanding of the cosmos, nature, and human beings. They brought experiential confirmation for the concepts formulated by pioneers of information theory and the theory of systems, which have shown that our planet and the entire cosmos represent a unified and interconnected web of which each of us is an integral part (Bateson, 1979; Capra, 1996). In holotropic states, we can gain deep experiential knowledge of various aspects of material reality, of its interconnectedness, and of the unity underlying the world of seeming separation. However, the ignorance symbolized in the Tibetan thangkas by the pig is not the absence or lack of knowledge in the ordinary sense. It does not mean simply inadequate information about various aspects of the material world, but ignorance of a much deeper and more fundamental kind.

The form of ignorance that is meant here (*avidya*) is a fundamental misunderstanding and confusion concerning the nature of reality and our own nature. The only remedy for this kind of ignorance is transcendental wisdom (*prajña paramita*). From this point of view, it is essential that the inner work involving holotropic states offers more than just increasing, deepening, and correcting our knowledge concerning the material universe. It is also a unique way of gaining insights about issues of transcendental relevance.

In the light of this evidence, consciousness is not a product of the physiological processes in the brain, but a primary attribute of existence. The deepest nature of humanity is not bestial, but divine. The universe is imbued with creative intelligence, and consciousness is inextricably woven into its fabric. Our identification with the separate body–ego is an illusion, and our true identity is the totality of existence. This understanding provides a natural

basis for reverence for life, cooperation and synergy, concerns for humanity and the planet as a whole, and deep ecological awareness.

## ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS

Let us now look from the same perspective at the second "poison," human propensity to aggression. Modern study of aggressive behavior started with Charles Darwin's epoch-making discoveries in the field of evolution in the middle of the 19th century (Darwin, 1952). The attempts to explain human aggression from our animal origin generated such theoretical concepts as Desmond Morris's image of the "naked ape" (Morris, 1967), Robert Ardrey's idea of the "territorial imperative" (Ardrey, 1961), Paul MacLean's "triune brain" (MacLean, 1973), and Richard Dawkins's sociobiological explanations interpreting aggression in terms of genetic strategies of the "selfish genes" (Dawkins, 1976). More refined models of behavior developed by pioneers in ethology, such as Konrad Lorenz, Nikolaas Tinbergen, and others, complemented mechanical emphasis on instincts by the study of ritualistic and motivational elements (Lorenz, 1963; Tinbergen, 1965).

Any theories suggesting that the human tendency to violence simply reflects our animal origin are inadequate and unconvincing. With rare exceptions, such as the occasional violent group raids of chimpanzees against neighboring groups (Wrangham & Peterson, 1996), animals do not prey on their own kind. They exhibit aggression when they are hungry, defend their territory, or compete for sex. The nature and scope of human violence—Erich Fromm's "malignant aggression"—have no parallels in the animal kingdom (Fromm, 1973). The realization that human aggression cannot be adequately explained as a result of phylogenetic evolution led to the formulation of psychodynamic and psychosocial theories that consider a significant part of human aggression to be learned phenomena. This trend began in the late 1930s and was initiated by the work of Dollard and Miller.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES OF AGGRESSION

Psychodynamic theories attempt to explain the specifically human aggression as a reaction to frustration, abuse, and lack of love in infancy and childhood. However, explanations of this kind fall painfully short of accounting for extreme forms of individual violence, such as the serial murders of the Boston Strangler and Jeffrey Dahmer or indiscriminate multiple killings of the "running amok" type. Current psychodynamic and psychosocial theories are even less convincing when it comes to bestial acts committed by entire groups, like the Sharon Tate murders by the Manson family or atrocities that occur during prison uprisings. They fail completely when it comes to mass

societal phenomena that involve entire nations, such as Nazism, Communism, bloody wars, revolutions, genocide, and concentration camps.

In the last several decades, psychedelic research and deep experiential psychotherapies have been able to throw much light on the problem of human aggression. This work has revealed that the roots of this problematic and dangerous aspect of human nature are much deeper and more formidable than traditional psychology ever imagined. However, this work has also discovered extremely effective approaches that have the potential to neutralize and transform these violent elements in human personality. In addition, these observations indicate that malignant aggression does not reflect true human nature. It is connected with a domain of unconscious dynamics that separates us from our deeper identity. When we reach the transpersonal realms that lie beyond this screen, we realize that our true nature is divine rather than bestial.

## PERINATAL ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

There is no doubt that "malignant aggression" is connected with traumas and frustrations in childhood and infancy. However, modern consciousness research has revealed additional significant roots of violence in deep recesses of the psyche that lie beyond postnatal biography and are related to the trauma of biological birth. The vital emergency, pain, and suffocation experienced for many hours during biological delivery generate enormous amounts of anxiety and murderous aggression that remain stored in the organism. The reliving of birth in various forms of experiential psychotherapy not only involves concrete replay of the original emotions and sensations but also is typically associated with a variety of experiences from the collective unconscious portraying scenes of unimaginable violence. Among these are often powerful sequences depicting wars, revolutions, racial riots, concentration camps, totalitarianism, and genocide.

The spontaneous emergence of this imagery during the reliving of birth is often associated with convincing insights concerning the perinatal origin of such extreme forms of human violence. Naturally, wars and revolutions are extremely complex phenomena that have historical, economic, political, religious, and other dimensions. The intention here is not to offer a reductionistic explanation replacing all the other causes, but to add some new insights concerning the psychological and spiritual dimensions of these forms of social psychopathology that have been neglected or received only superficial treatment in earlier theories.

The images of violent sociopolitical events accompanying the reliving of biological birth tend to appear in very specific connection with the four *basic perinatal matrices* (BPMs), which is my name for complex experiential patterns associated with the consecutive stages of the birth process. While

reliving episodes of undisturbed intrauterine existence (BPM I), we typically experience images from human societies with an ideal social structure, from cultures that live in complete harmony with nature, or from future utopian societies where all major conflicts have been resolved.

Disturbing intrauterine memories, such as those of a toxic womb, imminent miscarriage, or attempted abortion, are accompanied by images of human groups living in industrial areas where nature is polluted and spoiled, or in societies with an insidious social order and all-pervading paranoia.

Regressive experiences related to the first clinical stage of birth (BPM II), during which the uterus periodically contracts but the cervix is not yet open, present a diametrically different picture. They portray oppressive and abusive totalitarian societies that have closed borders, victimize their populations, and "choke" personal freedom, such as Czarist or Communist Russia, Hitler's Third Reich, Eastern European Soviet satellites, South American dictatorships, and South African apartheid; or bring specific images of the inmates in Nazi concentration camps and Stalin's Gulag Archipelago. While experiencing these scenes of living hell, we identify exclusively with the victims and feel deep sympathy for the downtrodden and the underdog.

The experiences accompanying reliving the second clinical stage of delivery (BPM III), when the cervix is dilated and continued contractions propel the fetus through the narrow passage of the birth canal, feature a rich panoply of violent scenes—bloody wars and revolutions, human or animal slaughter, mutilation, sexual abuse, and murder. These scenes often contain demonic elements and repulsive scatological motifs. Additional frequent concomitants of BPM III are visions of burning cities, the launching of rockets, and explosions of nuclear bombs. Here we are not limited to the role of victims, but can participate in three roles—that of the victim, of the aggressor, and of an emotionally involved observer.

The events characterizing the third clinical stage of delivery (BPM IV), the actual moment of birth and the separation from the mother, are typically associated with images of victory in wars and revolutions, the liberation of prisoners, and the success of collective efforts, such as patriotic or nationalistic movements. At this point, we can also experience visions of triumphant celebrations and parades or of exciting postwar reconstruction.

In 1975, I described these observations, linking sociopolitical upheavals to stages of biological birth, in my book *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (Grof, 1975). Shortly after its publication, I received an enthusiastic letter from Lloyd de Mause, a New York psychoanalyst and journalist. De Mause is one of the founders of psychohistory, a discipline that applies the findings of depth psychology to the study of history and political science. Psychohistorians explore such issues as the relationship between the childhood of political leaders and their system of values and process of decision making, or the influence of child-rearing practices on the nature of revolutions of that

particular historical period. Lloyd de Mause was very interested in my findings concerning the trauma of birth and its possible sociopolitical implications, because they provided independent support for his own research.

For some time, de Mause had been studying the psychodynamics of the periods immediately preceding wars and revolutions. It interested him how military leaders succeed in mobilizing masses of peaceful civilians and transforming them practically overnight into killing machines. His approach to this problem was very original and creative. In addition to analysis of traditional historical sources, he drew data of great psychological importance from caricatures, jokes, dreams, personal imagery, slips of the tongue, side comments of speakers, and even doodles and scribbles on the edge of the rough drafts of political documents. By the time he contacted me, he had analyzed in this way 17 situations preceding the outbreak of wars and revolutionary upheavals, spanning many centuries from antiquity to most recent times (de Mause, 1975).

He was struck by the extraordinary abundance of figures of speech, metaphors, and images related to biological birth that he found in this material. Military leaders and politicians of all ages describing a critical situation or declaring war typically used terms that equally applied to perinatal distress. They accused the enemy of choking and strangling their people, squeezing the last breath out of their lungs, or constricting them and not giving them enough space to live (e.g., Hitler's *Lebensraum*).

Equally frequent were allusions to dark caves, tunnels, and confusing labyrinths; dangerous abysses into which one might be pushed; and the threat of engulfment by treacherous quicksand or a terrifying whirlpool. Similarly, the offer of the resolution of the crisis had the form of perinatal images. The leader promised to rescue his nation from an ominous labyrinth, to lead it to the light on the other side of the tunnel, and to create a situation where the dangerous aggressor and oppressor will be overcome and everybody will again breathe freely.

Lloyd de Mause's historical examples at the time included such famous personages as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Samuel Adams, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Hitler, Khrushchev, and Kennedy. Samuel Adams, when talking about the American Revolution, referred to "the child of Independence now struggling for birth" (de Mause, 1975). In 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm stated that "the Monarchy has been seized by the throat and forced to choose between letting itself be strangled and making a last ditch effort to defend itself against attack" (quoted in de Mause, 1975).

During the Cuban missile crisis, Khrushchev wrote to Kennedy, pleading that the two nations not "come to a clash, like blind moles battling to death in a tunnel." Even more explicit was the coded message used by Japanese ambassador Kurusu when he phoned Tokyo to signal that negotiations with Roosevelt had broken down and that it was all right to go ahead with the

bombing of Pearl Harbor. He announced that the "birth of the child was imminent" and asked how things were in Japan: "Does it seem as if the child might be born?" The reply was "Yes, the birth of the child seems imminent." Interestingly, the American intelligence listening in recognized the meaning of the "war-as-birth" code. The most recent examples can be found in Osama bin Laden's videotape, where he threatens to turn the United States into a "choking hell," and in the speech of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who described the acute crisis in Iraq as "birth pangs of New Middle East."

Particularly chilling was the use of perinatal language in connection with the explosion of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. The airplane was given the name of the pilot's mother, Enola Gay; the atomic bomb itself carried a painted nickname, "The Little Boy"; and the agreed-upon message sent to Washington as a signal of successful detonation was "The baby was born." It would not be too far-fetched to see the image of a newborn also behind the nickname of the Nagasaki bomb, Fat Man. Since the time of our correspondence, Lloyd de Mause collected many additional historical examples and refined his thesis that the memory of the birth trauma plays an important role as a source of motivation for violent social activity.

The relationship between nuclear warfare and birth is of such relevance that I would like to explore it further using the material from a fascinating paper by Carol Cohn entitled "Sex and Death in the Rational World of the Defense Intellectuals" (1987). The defense intellectuals (DIs) are civilians who move in and out of government, working sometimes as administrative officials or consultants, sometimes at universities and think tanks. They create the theory that informs and legitimates U.S. nuclear strategic practice—how to manage the arms race, how to deter the use of nuclear weapons, how to fight a nuclear war if the deterrence fails, and how to explain why it is not safe to live without nuclear weapons.

Carol Cohn had attended a two-week summer seminar on nuclear weapons, nuclear strategic doctrine, and arms control. She was so fascinated by what had transpired there that she spent the following year immersed in the almost entirely male world (except for secretaries) of defense intellectuals. She collected some extremely interesting facts confirming the perinatal dimension in nuclear warfare. In her own terminology, this material confirms the importance of the motif of "male birth" and "male creation" as important psychological forces underlying the psychology of nuclear warfare. She used the following historical examples to illustrate her point of view:

> In 1942, Ernest Lawrence sent a telegram to a Chicago group of physicists developing the nuclear bomb that read, "Congratulations to the new parents. Can hardly wait to see the new arrival." At Los Alamos, the atom bomb was referred to as *Oppenheimer's baby*. Richard Feynman wrote in his article "Los Alamos From Below" that when he was

temporarily on leave after his wife's death, he received a telegram that read, "The baby is expected on such and such a day."

At Lawrence Livermore laboratories, the hydrogen bomb was referred to as *Teller's baby,* although those who wanted to disparage Edward Teller's contribution claimed he was not the bomb's father, but its mother. They claimed that Stanislaw Ulam was the real father, who had all the important ideas and "conceived it"; Teller only "carried it" after that. Terms related to motherhood were also used to the provision of "nurturance"—the maintenance of the missiles.

General Grove sent a triumphant coded cable to Secretary of War Henry Stimson at the Potsdam conference reporting the success of the first atomic test: "Doctor has just returned most enthusiastic and confident that the little boy is as husky as his big brother. The light in his eyes discernible from here to Highhold [Stimson's country home,] and I could have heard his screams from here to my farm." Stimson, in turn, informed Churchill by writing him a note that read, "Babies satisfactorily born."

William L. Laurence witnessed the test of the first atomic bomb and wrote, "The big boom came about a hundred seconds after the great flash—the first cry of a new-born world." Edward Teller's exultant telegram to Los Alamos, announcing the successful test of the hydrogen bomb "Mike" at the Eniwetok atoll in Marshall Islands, read, "It's a boy." The Enola Gay, "Little Boy," and "The baby was born" symbolism of the Hiroshima bomb, and the "Fat Man" symbolism of the Nagasaki bomb, were already mentioned earlier. According to Carol Cohn (1987), "[M] ale scientists gave birth to a progeny with the ultimate power of domination over female Nature."

Carol Cohn also mentions in her paper an abundance of overtly sexual symbolism in the language of defense intellectuals. The nature of this material, linking sex to aggression, domination, and scatology, shows a deep similarity to the imagery occurring in the context of birth experiences (BPM III). Cohn used the following examples: American dependence on nuclear weapons was explained as irresistible, because "you get more bang for the buck." A professor's explanation of why the MX missiles should be placed in the silos of the newest Minuteman missiles, instead of replacing the older, less accurate ones, was "You are not going to take the nicest missile you have and put it into a crummy hole." At one point, there was a serious concern that "we have to harden our missiles, because the Russians are a little harder than we are." One military adviser to the National Security Council referred to "releasing 70 to 80 percent of our megatonnage in one orgasmic whump."

Lectures were filled with terms like *vertical erector launchers, thrust-to-weight ratios, soft lay-downs, deep penetration,* and the comparative advantages of *protracted versus spasm attacks.* Another example was the popular and widespread custom of patting the missiles practiced by the visitors to nuclear

submarines, which Carol Cohn saw as an expression of phallic supremacy and also homoerotic tendencies. In view of this material, it clearly is quite appropriate for feminist critics of nuclear policies to refer to "missile envy" and "phallic worship."

Further support for the pivotal role of the perinatal domain of the unconscious in war psychology can be found in Sam Keen's excellent book *The Faces of the Enemy* (1988). Keen brought together an outstanding collection of war posters, propaganda cartoons, and caricatures from many historical periods and countries. He demonstrated that the way the enemy is described and portrayed during a war or revolution is a stereotype that shows only minimal variations and has very little to do with the actual characteristics of the country and its inhabitants. This material also typically disregards the diversity and heterogeneity characterizing the population of each country and makes blatant generalizations: "This is what the Germans, Americans, Japanese, Russians, etc. are like!"

Keen was able to divide these images into several archetypal categories according to the prevailing characteristics (e.g., Stranger, Aggressor, Worthy Opponent, Faceless, Enemy of God, Barbarian, Greedy, Criminal, Torturer, Rapist, and Death). According to him, the alleged images of the enemy are essentially projections of the repressed and unacknowledged shadow aspects of our own unconscious. Although we would certainly find in human history instances of just wars, those who initiate war activities are typically substituting external targets for elements in their own psyches that should be properly faced in personal self-exploration.

Sam Keen's theoretical framework does not specifically include the perinatal domain of the unconscious. However, the analysis of his picture material reveals a preponderance of symbolic images that are characteristic of BPM II and BPM III. The enemy is typically depicted as a dangerous octopus, a vicious dragon, a multiheaded hydra, a giant venomous tarantula, or an engulfing Leviathan. Other frequently used symbols include vicious predatory felines or birds, monstrous sharks, and ominous snakes, particularly vipers and boa constrictors. Scenes depicting strangulation or crushing, ominous whirlpools, and treacherous quicksands also abound in pictures from the time of wars, revolutions, and political crises. Juxtaposition of pictures from holotropic states of consciousness that focus on reliving birth with the historical pictorial documentation collected by Lloyd de Mause and Sam Keen represents strong evidence for the perinatal roots of human violence.

According to the new insights, provided jointly by observations from consciousness research and by the findings of psychohistory, we all carry in our deep unconscious powerful energies and emotions associated with the trauma of birth that we have not adequately processed and assimilated. For some of us, this aspect of our psyche can be completely unconscious, until and unless we embark on some in-depth self-exploration with the use of psychedelics or

some powerful experiential techniques of psychotherapy, such as holotropic breathwork or rebirthing. Others can have varying degrees of awareness of the emotions and physical sensations stored on the perinatal level of the unconscious.

Activation of this material can lead to serious individual psychopathology, including unmotivated violence. Lloyd de Mause (1975) suggested that, for unknown reasons, the awareness of the perinatal elements can increase simultaneously in a large number of people. This creates an atmosphere of general tension, anxiety, and anticipation. The leader is an individual who is under a stronger influence of the perinatal energies than the average person. He also has the ability to disown his unacceptable feelings (the *shadow* in Jung's terminology) and to project them on the external situation. The collective discomfort is blamed on the enemy, and a military intervention is offered as a solution. Richard Tarnas's extraordinary book *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New Worldview* (2006) added an interesting dimension to de Mause's thesis. In this meticulously researched study, Tarnas was able to show that throughout history, the times of wars and revolutions have been correlated with specific astrological transits, suggesting the participation of archetypal forces in these phenomena.

War and revolution provide an opportunity to disregard the psychological defenses that ordinarily keep the dangerous perinatal forces in check. Freud's superego, a psychological force that demands restraint and civilized behavior, is replaced by the *war superego.* We receive praise and medals for murder, indiscriminate destruction, and pillaging, the same behaviors that in peacetime are unacceptable and would land us in prison or worse. Similarly, sexual violence has been a common practice during wartime and has been generally tolerated. As a matter of fact, military leaders have often promised their soldiers unlimited access to women in the conquered territory to motivate them for battle.

Once the war erupts, the destructive and self-destructive perinatal impulses are freely acted out. The themes that we normally encounter in a certain stage of the process of inner exploration and transformation (BPM II and III) now become parts of our everyday life, either directly or in the form of TV news. Various no-exit situations, sadomasochistic orgies, sexual violence, bestial and demonic behavior, the unleashing of enormous explosive energies, and scatology, which belong to standard perinatal imagery, are all enacted in wars and revolutions with extraordinary vividness and power.

Witnessing scenes of destruction and the acting out of violent unconscious impulses, whether it occurs on the individual scale or collectively in wars and revolutions, does not result in healing and transformation as would an inner confrontation with these elements in a therapeutic context. The experience is not generated by our own unconscious, lacks the element of deep introspection, and does not lead to insights. The situation is fully externalized, and

connection with the deep dynamics of the psyche is missing. And, naturally, there is no therapeutic intention and motivation for change and transformation. Thus the goal of the underlying birth fantasy, which represents the deepest driving force of such violent events, is not achieved, even if the war or revolution has been brought to a successful closure. The most triumphant external victory does not deliver what was expected and hoped for: an inner sense of emotional liberation and psychospiritual rebirth.

After the initial intoxicating feelings of triumph come at first a sober awakening and later bitter disappointment. And it usually does not take a long time before a facsimile of the old oppressive system starts emerging from the ruins of the dead dream, because the same unconscious forces continue to operate in the deep unconscious of everybody involved. This seems to happen again and again in human history, whether the event involved is the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Communist Revolution in China, or any of the other violent upheavals associated with great hopes and expectations.

Because I conducted for many years deep experiential work in Prague at the time when Czechoslovakia had a Marxist regime, I was able to collect some fascinating material concerning the psychological dynamics of Communism. The issues related to Communist ideology typically emerged in the treatment of my clients at the time when they were struggling with perinatal energies and emotions. It soon became obvious that the passion the revolutionaries feel toward the oppressors and their regimes receives a powerful reinforcement from their revolt against the inner prison of their perinatal memories. And, conversely, the need to coerce and dominate others is an external displacement of the need to overcome the fear of being overwhelmed by one's own unconscious. The murderous entanglement of the oppressor and the revolutionary is thus an externalized replica of the situation experienced in the birth canal.

The Communist vision contains an element of psychological truth that has made it appealing to large numbers of people. The basic notion that a violent experience of a revolutionary nature is necessary to terminate suffering and oppression and institute a situation of greater harmony is correct when understood as related to the process of inner transformation. However, it is dangerously false when it is projected on the external world as a political ideology of violent revolutions. The fallacy lies in the fact that what on a deeper level is essentially an archetypal pattern of spiritual death and rebirth takes the form of an atheistic and antispiritual program. Paradoxically, Communism has many features in common with organized religion and exploits people's spiritual needs, while not only failing to satisfy them but also actively suppressing any genuine spiritual search. The parallel of Communism with organized religion goes so far that Stalin at the height of his power was declared infallible.

Communist revolutions have been extremely successful in their destructive phase, but, instead of the promised brotherhood and harmony, their victories have bred regimes where oppression, cruelty, and injustice ruled supreme. Today, when the economically ruined and politically corrupt Soviet Union has collapsed and the Communist world has fallen apart, it is obvious to all people with sane judgment that this gigantic historical experiment, conducted at the cost of millions of human lives and unimaginable human suffering, has been a colossal failure. If the above observations are correct, no external interventions have a chance to create a better world unless they are associated with a profound transformation of human consciousness.

The observations from the study of holotropic states also throw some important light on the psychology of concentration camps. Over a number of years, Professor Bastiaans in Leyden, Holland, conducted LSD therapy with people suffering from *concentration camp syndrome*, a condition that develops in former inmates of these camps many years after the incarceration. Bastiaans has also worked with former *kapos* on their issues of profound guilt. An artistic description of this work can be found in the book *Shivitti*, written by a former inmate, Ka-Tzetnik 135633, who underwent a series of therapeutic sessions with Bastiaans (Ka-Tzetnik 135633, 1989).

Bastiaans himself wrote a paper describing his work entitled "Man in the Concentration Camp and Concentration Camp in Man" (1955). There he pointed out, without specifying it, that the concentration camps are a projection of a certain domain that exists in the human unconscious: "Before there was a man in the concentration camp, there was a concentration camp in man" (Bastiaans, 1955). Study of holotropic states of consciousness makes it possible to identify the realm of the psyche that Bastiaans was talking about. Closer examination of the general and specific conditions in the Nazi concentration camps reveals that they are a diabolical and realistic enactment of the nightmarish atmosphere that characterizes the reliving of biological birth.

The barbed-wire barriers, high-voltage fences, watch towers with submachine guns, minefields, and packs of trained dogs certainly created a hellish and almost archetypal image of an utterly hopeless and oppressive no-exit situation that is so characteristic of the first clinical stage of birth (BPM II). At the same time, the elements of violence, bestiality, scatology, and sexual abuse of women and men, including rape and sadistic practices, all belong to the phenomenology of the second stage of birth (BPM III), familiar to people who have relived their birth. In the concentration camps, the sexual abuse existed on a random individual level, as well as in the context of the "houses of dolls," institutions providing "entertainment" for the officers. The only escape out of this hell was death—by a bullet, hunger, disease, or suffocation in the gas chambers. Two other books by Ka-Tzetnik 135633, *House of Dolls* and *Sunrise Over Hell* (Ka-Tzetnik, 1955, 1977), offer a shattering description of life in the concentration camps.

The bestiality of the SS seemed to be focused particularly on pregnant women and little children, which brings further support for the perinatal hypothesis. The most powerful passage from Terence des Près's book *The Survivor* (1976) is, without a doubt, the description of a truck full of babies dumped into fire, followed by a scene in which pregnant women are beaten with clubs and whips, torn by dogs, dragged around by the hair, kicked into the stomach, and then thrown into the crematorium while still alive (des Près, 1976).

The perinatal nature of the irrational impulses manifesting in the camps is evident also in the scatological behavior of the *kapos*. Throwing eating bowls into the latrines and asking the inmates for their retrieval, and forcing the inmates to urinate into each other's mouths, were practices that besides their bestiality brought the danger of epidemics. Had the concentration camps been simply institutions providing isolation of political enemies and cheap slave labor, maintenance of hygienic rules would have been a primary concern of the organizers, as it is the case in any facility accommodating large numbers of people. In Buchenwald alone, as a result of these perverted practices, 27 inmates drowned in feces in the course of a single month.

The intensity, depth, and convincing nature of all the experiences of collective violence associated with the perinatal process suggest that they are not individually fabricated from such sources as adventure books, movies, and TV shows, but originate in the deep unconscious. When our experiential self-exploration reaches the memory of the birth trauma, we also connect to an immense pool of painful memories of the human species and gain access to experiences of other people who once were in a similar predicament. It is not hard to imagine that the perinatal level of our unconscious that "knows" so intimately the history of human violence is actually partially responsible for wars, revolutions, and similar atrocities.

The intensity and quantity of the perinatal experiences portraying various brutalities of human history are truly astonishing. Christopher Bache, after having carefully analyzed various aspects of this phenomenon, made an interesting conclusion. He suggested that the memories of the violence perpetrated throughout ages in human history contaminated the collective unconscious in the same way in which the traumas from our infancy and childhood polluted our individual unconscious. According to Bache, it might then be possible that when we start experiencing these collective memories, our inner process transcends the framework of personal therapy and we participate in the healing of the field of species consciousness.

The role of the birth trauma as a source of violence and self-destructive tendencies has been confirmed by clinical studies. For example, there seems to be an important correlation between difficult birth and crininality (Kandel & Mednick, 1991; Litt, 1974; Raine, Brennan, & Mednick, 1995). In a similar way, aggression directed inward, particularly suicide, seems to be

psychogenetically linked to difficult birth (Appleby, 1998). The Scandinavian researcher Bertil Jacobson (Jacobsen et al., 1987) found a close correlation between the form of self-destructive behavior and the nature of birth. Suicides involving asphyxiation were associated with suffocation at birth, violent suicides with mechanical birth trauma, and drug addiction leading to suicide with opiate and/or barbiturate administration during labor.

The circumstances of birth play an important role in creating a disposition to violence and self-destructive tendencies or, conversely, to loving behavior and healthy interpersonal relationships. French obstetrician Michel Odent (1995) has shown how the hormones involved in the birth process and in nursing and maternal behavior participate in this imprinting. The catecholamines (adrenaline and noradrenaline) play an important role in evolution as mediators of the aggressive-protective instinct of the mother at the time when birth was occurring in unprotected natural environments. Oxytocin, prolactin, and endorphins are known to induce maternal behavior in animals and foster dependency and attachment. The busy, noisy, and chaotic milieu of many hospitals induces anxiety, engages unnecessarily the adrenaline system, and imprints the picture of a world that is potentially dangerous and requires aggressive responses. This interferes with the hormones that mediate positive interpersonal imprinting. It is, therefore, essential to provide for birthing in a quiet, safe, and private environment (Odent, 1995).

## TRANSPERSONAL ORIGINS OF VIOLENCE

The above material shows that a conceptual framework limited to postnatal biography and the Freudian unconscious does not adequately explain extreme forms of human aggression on the individual and collective scale. However, it seems that the roots of human violence reach even deeper than to the perinatal level of the psyche. Consciousness research has revealed significant additional sources of aggression in the transpersonal domain, such as archetypal figures of demons and wrathful deities, complex destructive mythological themes, and past-life memories of physical and emotional abuse.

C. G. Jung (1964) believed that the archetypes of the collective unconscious have a powerful influence not only on the behavior of individuals but also on the events of human history. From this point of view, entire nations and cultural groups might be enacting in their behavior important mythological themes. In the decade preceding the outbreak of World War II, Jung found in the dreams of his German patients many elements from the Nordic myth of Ragnarok, or the Twilight of the Gods. On the basis of these observations, he concluded that this archetype was emerging in the collective psyche of the German nation and that it would lead to a major catastrophe, which would ultimately turn out to be self-destructive. James Hillman amassed in his brilliant book *A Terrible Love of War* (2004) convincing evidence that war

is a powerful archetypal force that has irresistible power over individuals and nations.

In many instances, leaders of nations specifically use not only perinatal but also archetypal images and spiritual symbolism to achieve their political goals. The medieval crusaders were asked to sacrifice their lives for Jesus in a war that would recover the Holy Land from the Mohammedans. Adolf Hitler exploited the mythological motifs of the supremacy of the Nordic race and of the millennial empire, as well as the ancient Vedic symbols of the swastika and the solar eagle. Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein ignited the imagination of their Muslim followers by references to *jihad*, the holy war against the infidels. American president Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as the "evil empire," and George W. Bush in his political speeches referred to the "axis of evil" and Armageddon.

Carol Cohn discussed in her paper not only the perinatal but also the spiritual symbolism associated with the language used in relation to nuclear weaponry and doctrine. The authors of the strategic doctrine refer to members of their community as the "nuclear priesthood." The first atomic test was called Trinity—the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the male forces of creation. From her feminist perspective, Cohn (1987) saw this as an effort of male scientists to appropriate and claim ultimate creative power. The scientists who worked on the atomic bomb and witnessed the test described it in the following way: "It was as though we stood at the first day of creation"; and Robert Oppenheimer thought of Krishna's words to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "I am become Death, the Shatterer of Worlds."

## BIOGRAPHICAL DETERMINANTS OF INSATIABLE GREED

This brings us to the third poison of Tibetan Buddhism, a powerful psychospiritual force that combines the qualities of lust, desire, and insatiable greed. Together with "malignant aggression," these qualities are certainly responsible for some of the darkest chapters in human history. Western psychologists link various aspects of this force to the libidinal drives described by Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalytic interpretation of the insatiable human need to achieve, to possess, and to become more than one is attributes this psychological force to the sublimation of lower instincts.

According to Freud (1955),

> What appears as . . . an untiring impulse toward further perfection can easily be understood as a result of the instinctual repression upon which is based all that is most precious in human civilization. The repressed instinct never ceases to strive for complete satisfaction, which would consist in the repetition of a primary experience of satisfaction. No substitutive or

reactive formations and no sublimations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct's persisting tension.

More specifically, Freud saw greed as a phenomenon related to problems during the nursing period. According to him, frustration or overindulgence during the oral phase of libidinal development can reinforce the primitive infantile need to incorporate objects to such an extent that in adulthood it is transferred in a sublimated form to a variety of other objects and situations. When the acquisitive drive focuses on money, psychoanalysts attribute it to fixation on the anal stage of libidinal development. Insatiable sexual appetite is then considered to be the result of phallic fixation. Many other unrelenting human pursuits are then interpreted in terms of sublimation of such phallic instinctual urges. Modern consciousness research has found these interpretations to be superficial and inadequate. It discovered significant additional sources of acquisitiveness and greed on the perinatal and transpersonal levels of the unconscious.

## PERINATAL SOURCES OF INSATIABLE GREED

In the course of biographically oriented psychotherapy, many people discover that their life has been inauthentic in certain specific sectors of interpersonal relations. For example, problems with parental authority can lead to specific patterns of difficulties with authority figures, repeated dysfunctional patterns in sexual relationships can be traced to parents as models for sexual behavior, sibling issues can color and distort future peer relationships, and so on.

When the process of experiential self-exploration reaches the perinatal level, we typically discover that our life up to that point has been largely inauthentic in its totality, not just in certain partial segments. We find out to our surprise and astonishment that our entire life strategy has been misdirected and therefore incapable of providing genuine satisfaction. The reason for this is the fact that it was primarily motivated by the fear of death and by unconscious forces associated with biological birth, which have not been adequately processed and integrated. In other words, during biological birth, we completed the process anatomically but not emotionally.

When our field of consciousness is strongly influenced by the underlying memory of the struggle in the birth canal, it leads to a feeling of discomfort and dissatisfaction with the present situation. This discontent can focus on a large spectrum of issues—unsatisfactory physical appearance, inadequate resources and material possessions, low social position and influence, insufficient amount of power and fame, and many others. Like the child stuck in the birth canal, we feel a strong need to get to a better situation that lies somewhere in the future.

Whatever is the reality of the present circumstances, we do not find it satisfactory. Our fantasy keeps creating images of future situations that appear more fulfilling than the present one. It seems that, until we reach it, life will be only preparation for a better future, not yet "the real thing." This results in a life pattern that people involved in experiential self-exploration have described as a "treadmill" or "rat-race" type of existence. The existentialists talk about "auto-projecting" into the future. This strategy is a basic fallacy of human life. It is essentially a loser strategy, whether or not we achieve the goals that we have set for ourselves, because they do not deliver the satisfaction that we expect.

When the goal is not reached, the continuing dissatisfaction is attributed to the fact that we have failed to reach the corrective measures. When we succeed in reaching the goal of our aspirations, it typically does not have much influence on our basic life feelings. The continuing dissatisfaction is then blamed on the fact that either the choice of the goal was not correct or it was not ambitious enough. The result is either substitution of the old goal with a different one or amplification of the same type of ambitions. We cannot get enough of what we really do not want or need.

In any case, the failure is not correctly diagnosed as being an inevitable result of a fundamentally wrong strategy, which is in principle incapable of providing satisfaction. This fallacious pattern applied on a large scale is responsible for reckless irrational pursuit of various grandiose goals that result in much suffering and many problems in the world. It can be played out on any level of importance and affluence, because it never brings true satisfaction. The only strategy that can significantly reduce this irrational drive is full conscious reliving and integration of the trauma of birth in systematic inner self-exploration.

## TRANSPERSONAL CAUSES OF INSATIABLE GREED

Modern consciousness research and experiential psychotherapy have discovered that the deepest source of our dissatisfaction and striving for perfection lies even beyond the perinatal domain. This insatiable craving that drives human life is ultimately transpersonal in nature. In Dante Alighieri's (1990) words, "The desire for perfection is that desire which always makes every pleasure appear incomplete, for there is no joy or pleasure so great in this life that it can quench the thirst in our soul."

In the most general sense, the deepest transpersonal roots of insatiable greed can best be understood in terms of Ken Wilber's concept of the Atman project (Wilber, 1980). Our true nature is divine—God, Cosmic Christ, Allah, Buddha, Brahma, and the Tao—and, although the process of incarnation separates and alienates us from our source, the awareness of this fact is never completely lost. The deepest motivating force in the psyche on all

the levels of consciousness evolution is to return to the experience of our divinity. However, the constraining conditions of the consecutive stages of development stand in the way of this experience.

Real transcendence requires death of the separate self, dying to the exclusive subject. Because of the fear of annihilation and because of grasping onto the ego, the individual has to settle for Atman substitutes or surrogates, which are specific for each particular stage. For the fetus and the newborn, this means the satisfaction experienced in the good womb or on the good breast. For an infant, this is satisfaction of age-specific physiological needs. For the adult, the range of possible Atman projects is large; it includes, besides food and sex, money, fame, power, appearance, knowledge, and many others.

Because of our deep sense that our true identity is the totality of cosmic creation and the creative principle itself, substitutes of any degree and scope—the Atman projects—will always remain unsatisfactory. Only the experience of one's divinity in a holotropic state of consciousness can ever fulfill our deepest needs. Thus, the ultimate solution for the insatiable greed is in the inner world, not in secular pursuits of any kind or scope. The great 13th-century Persian mystic and poet Rumi made it very clear:

> All the hopes, desires, loves, and affections that people have for different things—fathers, mothers, friends, heavens, the earth, palaces, sciences, works, food, drink—the saint knows that these are desires for God and all those things are veils. When men leave this world and see the King without these veils, then they will know that all were veils and coverings, that the object of their desire was in reality that One Thing.

## TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SACRED AND HUMAN SURVIVAL

The finding that the roots of human violence and insatiable greed reach far deeper than academic psychiatry ever suspected and that their reservoirs in the psyche are truly enormous could in and of itself be very discouraging. However, it is balanced by the exciting discovery of new therapeutic mechanisms and transformative potentials that become available in holotropic states on the perinatal and transpersonal levels of the psyche.

I have seen over the years profound emotional and psychosomatic healing, as well as radical personality transformation, in many people who were involved in serious and systematic inner quest. Some of them were meditators and had regular spiritual practice; others had supervised psychedelic sessions or participated in various forms of experiential psychotherapy and self-exploration. I have also witnessed profound positive changes in many people who received adequate support during spontaneous episodes of psychospiritual crises.

As the content of the perinatal level of the unconscious emerged into consciousness and was integrated, these individuals underwent radical personality changes. The level of aggression typically decreased considerably, and they became more peaceful, comfortable with themselves, and tolerant of others. The experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth and conscious connection with positive postnatal or prenatal memories reduced irrational drives and ambitions. It caused a shift of focus from the past and future to the present moment and enhanced the ability to enjoy simple circumstances of life, such as everyday activities, food, lovemaking, nature, and music. Another important result of this process was the emergence of spirituality of a universal and mystical nature that was very authentic and convincing, because it was based on deep personal experience.

The process of spiritual opening and transformation typically deepened further as a result of transpersonal experiences, such as identification with other people, entire human groups, animals, plants, and even inorganic materials and processes in nature. Other experiences provided conscious access to events occurring in other countries, cultures, and historical periods and even to the mythological realms and archetypal beings of the collective unconscious. Experiences of cosmic unity and one's own divinity led to increasing identification with all of creation and brought a sense of wonder, love, compassion, and inner peace.

What had begun as psychological probing of the unconscious psyche automatically became a philosophical quest for the meaning of life and a journey of spiritual discovery. People who connected to the transpersonal domain of their psyche tended to develop a new appreciation for existence and reverence for all life. One of the most striking consequences of various forms of transpersonal experiences was the spontaneous emergence and development of deep humanitarian and ecological concerns and the need to get involved in service for some common purpose. This was based on an almost cellular awareness that the boundaries in the universe are arbitrary and that each of us is ultimately identical with the entire web of existence.

It was suddenly clear that we cannot do anything to nature without simultaneously doing it to ourselves. Differences among people appeared to be interesting and enriching rather than threatening, whether they were related to sex, race, color, language, political conviction, or religious belief. It is obvious that a transformation of this kind would increase our chances for survival if it could occur on a sufficiently large scale.

## LESSONS FROM HOLOTROPIC STATES FOR THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SURVIVAL

Some of the insights of people experiencing holotropic states of consciousness are directly related to the current global crisis and its relationship

with consciousness evolution. They show that we have exteriorized in the modern world many of the essential themes of the perinatal process that a person involved in spiritual quest and deep personal transformation has to face internally. The same elements that we would encounter in the process of psychological death and rebirth in our visionary experiences make these days our evening news. This is particularly true in regard to the phenomena that characterize BPM III, such as destruction, explosions, consuming fire, scenes of violence, and satanic acts.

We certainly see the enormous unleashing of the aggressive impulse in the many wars and revolutionary upheavals in the world, in the rising criminality, escalating terrorism, and racial riots. Equally dramatic and striking is the lifting of sexual repression and freeing of the sexual impulse in both healthy and problematic ways. Sexual experiences and behaviors are taking unprecedented forms, as manifested in the sexual freedom of youngsters; gay liberation; general promiscuity; open marriages; the high divorce rate; overtly sexual books, plays, and movies; sadomasochistic experimentation; and many others.

The demonic element is also becoming increasingly manifest in the modern world. The renaissance of satanic cults and witchcraft, popularity of books and horror movies with occult themes, and crimes with satanic motivations attest to that fact. The acts of Nazis, Communists, and terrorists, including suicide bombers, resulting in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians certainly qualify for satanic behavior. The scatological dimension is evident in the progressive industrial pollution, accumulation of waste products on a global scale, and rapidly deteriorating hygienic conditions in large cities. A more abstract form of the same trend is the escalating corruption and degradation in political and economic circles.

Many of the people with whom we have worked saw humanity at a critical crossroad facing either collective annihilation or an evolutionary jump in consciousness of unprecedented proportions. Terence McKenna (1992) put it very succinctly: "The history of the silly monkey is over, one way or another." It seems that we all are collectively involved in a process that parallels the psychological death and rebirth process that so many people have experienced internally in holotropic states of consciousness. If we continue to act out the problematic destructive and self-destructive tendencies originating in the depth of the unconscious, we will undoubtedly destroy ourselves and possibly life on this planet. However, if we succeed in internalizing this process on a large enough scale, it might result in an evolutionary progress of unprecedented proportions. As utopian as the possibility of such a development might seem, it might be our only real hope for the future.

Let us now explore how the concepts that have emerged from consciousness research, from transpersonal psychology, and from the new paradigm in science could be put into action in the world. Although revolutionary advances in many disciplines have laid foundations of a new scientific

worldview, the new ideas still form a disjointed mosaic rather than a complete and comprehensive new vision of the universe. Much work has to be done in terms of accumulating more data, formulating new theories, and achieving a creative synthesis. In addition, the existing information has to reach much larger audiences before a significant impact on the world situation can be expected.

But even a radical intellectual shift to a new paradigm on a large scale would not be sufficient to alleviate the global crisis and reverse the destructive course we are on. This would require a deep emotional and spiritual transformation of humanity. Using the existing evidence, it is possible to suggest certain strategies that might facilitate and support such a process. Efforts to change humanity would have to start with psychological prevention at an early age. The data from prenatal and perinatal psychology indicate that much could be achieved by changing the conditions of pregnancy, delivery, and postnatal care. This would include improving the emotional preparation of the mother during pregnancy, practicing natural childbirth, creating a psychospiritually informed birth environment, and cultivating emotionally nourishing contact between the mother and the child in the postpartum period.

Much has been written about the importance of child rearing, as well as the disastrous emotional consequences of traumatic conditions in infancy and childhood. Certainly this is an area where continued education and guidance are necessary. However, to apply the theoretically known principles, parents themselves must reach sufficient emotional stability and maturity. It is well known that emotional problems are passed like a curse from generation to generation; it is not unlike the well-known problem of the chicken and the egg.

Humanistic and transpersonal psychologies have developed effective experiential methods of self-exploration, healing, and personality transformation. Some of these come from Western therapeutic traditions, and others represent modern adaptations of ancient and native spiritual practices. Besides offering emotional healing, these approaches have the potential to return genuine experiential spirituality into Western culture and remedy the alienation of modern humanity. There exist approaches with a very favorable ratio between professional helpers and clients and others that can be practiced in the context of self-help groups. Systematic work with them could return spiritual values into the industrial civilization and facilitate a transformation of humanity that is sorely needed for survival of our species. For this to succeed, it would be essential to involve mass media and spread the information about these possibilities to get enough people personally interested in pursuing them.

We seem to be involved in a dramatic race for time that has no precedent in the entire history of humanity. What is at stake is nothing less than the

future of life on this planet. If we continue the old strategies, which in their consequences are clearly extremely destructive and self-destructive, it is unlikely that the human species will survive. However, if a sufficient number of people could undergo a process of deep inner transformation, we might reach a level of consciousness evolution where we would deserve the name we have so proudly given to our species: *Homo sapiens sapiens.*

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